Jane Cable

... By ...

GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON,

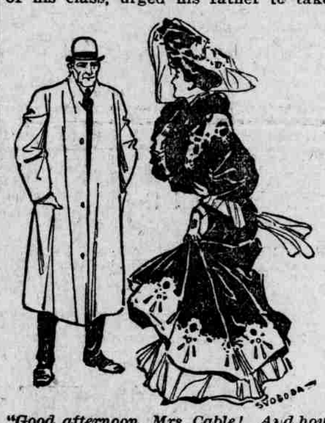
Author of "Beverly of Graustark," Etc.

(Continued.)

James Bansemer's law and loan offices were not far from the river and, it is sufficient to say, not much farther from State street. He who knows Chicago well cannot miss the location more than three blocks either way if he takes city hall as a focal point. The office building in which they were located is not a pretentious structure, but its tenants were then and still are regarded as desirable. It may be well to announce that Bansemer on reaching Chicago was clever enough to turn over a new leaf and begin work on a clear white page, but it is scarcely necessary to add that the black, besmirched lines on the opposite side of the sheet could be traced through every entry that went down on the fresh white surface. Bansemer was just as nefarious in his transactions, but he was a thousandfold more cautious. Droom sarcastically reminded him that he had a reputation to protect in his new field, and, besides, as his son was "going in society" through the influence of a coterie of Yale men, it would be worse than criminal to deteriorate.

Bansemer loathed Droom, but he also feared him. He was the only living creature that inspired fear in the heart of this bold schemer. It is true that he feared the effect an exposure might have on the mind of his stalwart son, the boy with his mother's eyes, but he had succeeded so well in blinding the youth in the years gone by that the prospects of discovery now seemed too remote for concern. The erstwhile New York shark was now an eel, wily and elusive, but he was an eel with a shark's teeth and a shark's voraciousness. He had grown old in the study of this particular branch of natural history. Bansemer was fifty-five years old in this year of 1898. He was thinner than in the old New York days, but the bull-like vigor had given way to the wiry strength of the leopard. The once black hair was almost white and grew low and thick on his forehead. Immaculately dressed, ever straight and aggressive in carriage, he soon became a figure of whom all eyes took notice even in the most crowded of Chicago thoroughfares.

Graydon Bansemer, on leaving Yale with a diploma and some of the honors of his class, urged his father to take



"Good afternoon, Mrs. Cable! And how is the baby?"

him into his office and ultimately to make him a partner in the business. James Bansemer never forgot the malicious grin that crossed the face of Elias Droom when the young fellow made the proposition not more than a fortnight before the Bansemer establishment picked itself up and dastily deserted New York. That grin spoke plainer than all the words in language. Take him into the office? Make this honest, gray eyed boy a partner? It was no wonder that Droom grinned, and it is no wonder that he forgot to cover his mouth with his huge hand, as was his custom.

The proposition, while sincere and earnest, was too impossible for words. For once in his life James Bansemer was at a loss for subterfuge. He stammered, flushed and writhed in the effort to show the young man that the step would be unprofitable, and he was sorely conscious that he had not convinced the eager applicant. He even urged him to abandon the thought of becoming a lawyer and was ably seconded by Elias Droom, whose opinion of the law, as he had come to know it, was far from flattering.

Just at this time Bansemer was engaged in the most daring as well as the most prodigious "deal" of his long career. With luck it was bound to enrich him to the extent of $50,000. The plans had been so well prepared and the execution had been so faultless that there seemed to be no possibility of failure. To take his fair minded son, with the mother's eyes, into the game would be suicidal. The young fellow would turn from him forever. Bansemer never went so far as to wonder whence came the honest blood in the boy's veins nor to speculate on the origin of the unquestioned integrity. He had but to recall the woman who bore him, the woman whose love was the only good thing he ever knew, the wife he had worshiped while he sinned.

For years and years he had plied his unwholesome trade in reputations, sometimes evading exposure by the narrowest of margins, and he had come to believe that he was secure for all time to come. But it was the "big job" that brought disaster. Just when it looked as though success was assured the crash came. He barely had time to cover his tracks, throw the figurative pepper into the eyes of his enemies and get away from the scene of danger. But he had been clever and resourceful enough to avoid the penalty that looked inevitable and came off with colors trailing, but uncaptured.

Perhaps no other man could have escaped. But James Bansemer was cleverest when in a corner. He backed away, held them at bay until he could recover his breath and then defied them to their teeth. Despite their proof he baffled them, and virtue was not its own reward—at least in this instance.

In leaving New York he hoped that Elias Droom, who knew too much, might refuse to go into the new territory with him, but the gaunt old clerk took an unnatural and malevolent delight in clinging to his employer. He declined to give up his place in the office, and although he hated James Bansemer, he came like an accusing shadow into the new offices near the Chicago river, and there he toiled, grinned and scowled with the same old faithfulness.

CHAPTER VI.

AT first it was hard for James Bansemer to believe that his henchman had not been mistaken. Droom's description of the lady certainly did not correspond to what his memory recalled. Investigation, however, assured him that the Cables in the mansion near the lake were the people he had known in New York. Bansemer took no one into his confidence, not even Droom. Once convinced that the erstwhile fireman was now the rich and powerful magnate, he set to work upon the machinery which was to extract personal gain from the secret in his possession. He soon learned that the child was a young woman of considerable standing in society, but there was no way for him to ascertain whether Frances Cable had told the truth to her husband in those dreary far west days.

Bansemer was rich enough, but avarice had become a habit. The flight from New York had deprived him of but little in worldly goods. His ill gotten gains came with him, and investments were just as easy and just as safe in Chicago as in New York. Now he saw a chance to wring a handsome sum from the rich woman whose only possession had been love when he first knew her. If the secret of Jane's origin still remained locked up in her heart the effort would be an easy one. He learned enough of David Cable, however, to know that if he shared the secret the plan would be profitless and dangerous.

It was this uncertainty that kept him from calling at the Cable home; likewise from writing a note which might prove a most disastrous folly. Time and circumstance could be his only friends, and he was accustomed to the whims of both. He read of the dinners and entertainments given by the Cables and smiled grimly. Time had worked wonders for them. Scandal, he knew, could undo all that ambition and pride had wrought. He could well afford to wait.

However, he did not have long to wait, for his opportunity came one night in Hooley's theater. Graydon and he occupied seats in the orchestra near the stage and not far from the lower right hand boxes. It was during the busy Christmas holidays, but the "star" was of sufficient consequence to pack the house. The audience was no end of a fashionable one. Time and again some strange influence drew his gaze to the gay party in one of the lower boxes. The face of the woman nearest to him was not visible, but the two girls who sat forward turned occasionally to look over the audience, and he saw that they were pretty, one exceptionally so. One of the men was gray haired and strong featured; the others were quite too insignificant to be of interest to him. The woman whose back he could see did not look out over the audience. Her indifference was so marked that it seemed deliberate.

At last he felt that her eyes were upon him. He turned quickly. True enough, for with lips slightly parted, her whole attitude suggestive of intense restraint, Mrs. Cable was staring helplessly into the eyes of the man who could destroy her with a word.

The one thing that flashed through Bansemer's brain was the realization that she was far more beautiful than he had expected her to be. There was a truly aristocratic loveliness in the rather piquant face, and she undeniably possessed "manner." Maturity had improved her vastly, he confessed, with strange exultation; age had been kinder than youth. He forgot the play, seldom taking his eyes from the back which again had been turned to him. Calculating, he reached the conclusion that she was not more than forty years of age. More than once he made some remark to his son, only to surprise that young man glancing surreptitiously at the face of the more beautiful of the two girls. Even in this early stage James Bansemer began to gloat over the beauty of this new found old acquaintance.

In the lobby of the theater as they were leaving he deliberately doffed his hat and extended a pleasant hand to the wife of David Cable. She turned deathly pale, and there was a startled, piteous look in her eyes that convinced him beyond all shadow of a doubt. There was nothing for her to do but introduce him to her husband. Two minutes later Graydon Bansemer and Jane Cable, strangers until then, were asking each other how they liked the play, and Fate was at work.

A few weeks after this scene at the theater young Mr. Bansemer dashed across the hall from the elevator and entered his father's office just as Elias Droom was closing up.

"Where's the governor, Mr. Droom?" he asked, deliberately brushing past the old clerk in the outer office.

"Left some time ago," replied Droom somewhat ungraciously, his blue eyes staring past the young man with a steadiness that suggested reproach because he was out of the direct line of vision. "It is nearly 6 o'clock. He's never here after 5."

"I know that he— I asked you if you knew of his whereabouts. Do you—or not?" The self confident, athletic youth did not stand in physical awe of the clerk.

"No," was the simple and sufficient answer.

"Well, then, I'm off," said Graydon a trifle less airily.

Droom's overcoat was on and buttoned up to his chin. His long feet were encased in rubbers of enormous size and uncertain age. There must have been no blood in the veins of this grim old man, for the weather was far from cold, and the streets were surprisingly dry for Chicago.

"I am closing the office for the day," said Droom. For no apparent reason a smile spread over the lower part of his face, and Graydon, bold as he was, turned his eyes away.

"I thought I'd stop in and pick up the governor for a ride home in my motor," said he, turning to the door.

"Yours is one of the first out here, I suppose," came from the thin lips of the old clerk.

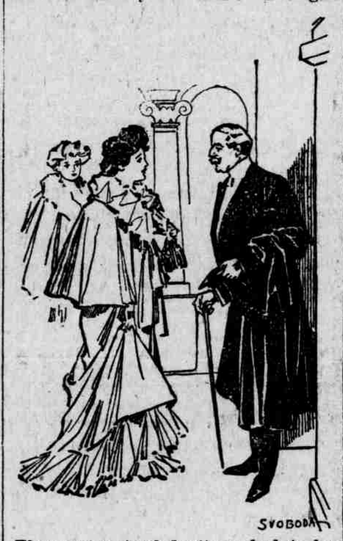
Graydon laughed.

"Possibly. The company charges a nickel a ride, half a dime. Going down, sir?" Graydon had rung for the elevator and was waiting in front of the grating.

A look containing a curious compound of affectionate reproach and a certain senile gratification at being made the object of the boy's condescending raillery crossed Droom's countenance. Without, however, answering his question he slowly and carefully closed the door, tried it vigorously and joined Bansemer at the shaft. With Droom words were unnecessary when actions could speak for themselves.

"Still living over in Wells street, Mr. Droom?" went on Graydon, thoroughly at home with the man whom he had feared and despised by stages from childhood up.

"It's good enough for me," said Droom shortly. "'Tisn't Michigan



There was a startled, piteous look in her eyes.

avenue, the Drive or Lincoln Park boulevard, but it's just as swell as I am or ever hope to be."

"There's nothing against Wells street, but—it got ashamed of itself when it crossed the river."

"They call it Fifth avenue," sneered Droom, "but it isn't *the* avenue, is it?" Bansemer was surprised to note a tone of affectionate pride in the question.

"No indeed!"

"Oh, there's only one, Mr. Graydon," said the old clerk quite warmly; "our own Fifth avenue!"

"I had no idea you cared so much for swagger things, Mr. Droom," observed the other, genuinely surprised.

"Even Broadway is heaven to me," said Droom, some of the rasp gone from his voice. "Goodby. I got this way," he said when they reached the sidewalk a little later. The young man watched his gaunt figure as it slouched away in the semidarkness.

"By George, the old chap is actually homesick!" muttered he. "I didn't think it was in him."

Droom had rooms over a millinery shop in Wells street. There was a bedroom at the back and a "living room" in front, overlooking the street from the third story of the building. Of the bedchamber there is but little to say, except that it contained a bed, a washstand, a mirror, two straight backed chairs and a clothespress Droom went out for his bath—every Saturday night. The "living room," however, was queer in more ways than one. In one corner on a chest of drawers stood his oil stove, while in the opposite corner a big sheet iron heater made itself conspicuous. Firewood was piled behind the stove winter and summer, Droom lamenting that one could not safely discriminate between the seasons in Chicago. The chest of drawers contained his stock of provisions, his cooking and table utensils, his medicine and a small assortment of carpenter's tools. He had no use for an icebox.

A bookcase, old enough to warm the heart of the most ardent antiquarian, held his small and unusual collection of books. Standing side by side on the same shelf were French romances and the Holy Bible, much bethumbed and pencilled. There were schoolbooks alongside of sentimental love tales, Greek lexicons and quaint old fairy stories, law books and works on criminology; books on botany, geology, anatomy and physics. In all perhaps there were 200 volumes. A life of Napoleon revealed signs of almost constant usage. There were three portraits of the Corsican on the dingy green walls.

(To be Continued.)